American Army on the Meuse the Backbone of Allied Attack

Pershing's Autumn Operations Are Fundamental to the Foch Plan

By HILAIRE BELLOC

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I DESIRE this week to turn from the general situation of the war to the particular point of interest to American readers and discuss the situation on either side of the Upper Meuse, together with the factor of continuity in effort, which is of the highest interest and importance at the present moment; in other words, the continuance of pressure on the enemy during the winter.

For an understanding of the two sectors of the Upper Meuse, east and west of the river, and the nature and value of pressure there, three things must be apprehended. First, why this sector is of such vital importance to the enemy; second, the function in strategy of "containing the wing"; third, the principle which has governed the whole Allied attack since the middle of July, which is given no technical name, but which I will call, for lack of a better title, "suction."

First, then, why was the sector where the American army initiated the attack of September 26 of vital importance to the enemy? Why was it more important than any other sector? There are two reasons. First, it faced the hinge upon which must pivot any great enemy retirement. Second, because any considerable Allied advance at this point would hamper the supplies of the armies of the enemy in northern France and compel the surrender of a great proportion of these, with a possible decisive result.

Communications Through Belgium and Lorraine

The nature of the ground and the political developments of centuries consequent on it have compelled all the main communications of the armies proceeding from east to west out of Germany into France to lie through the Belgian plain and through Lorraine. At the present moment both the Belgian plain and the fertile, metalliferous Lorraine district are a network of railways and roads by which very large armies can be supplied and wounded evacuated, two things equally important to maintaining the life and health of a force.

To the south of Lorraine lie the Vosges and to the south of the Belgian plain lies the difficult country of the Ardennes. Through neither is there the proper communication to the front that can only be found in a sheaf of communications through open country, such as Luxemburg, Metz and all the gap up to the Vosges, or the open country of the Belgian plain, which, after the bottle-neck of Liège has been passed, opens up in a fan-like system of railroads from Ghent and Brussels on the north to Namur on the south.

The German armies stood five weeks ago, after the reduction of their salients, with a loss of some 200,000 prisoners and half a million casualties and nearly 3,000 guns, on a line which ran pretty well north and south from a few miles west of Ostend down to the sector of the front between Laon and Soissons, at which point they turned the corner of an obtuse angle and carried on eastward and a little south past Rheims, through the Argonne forest and to the Meuse below Verdun. There they turned another corner and ran southward and a little east after the reduction of the St. Mihiel salient on September 12 to the Moselle above Metz at Pont-à-Mousson, covering Nancy and Lunéville, and so on to the Vosges.

Advance Would Threaten the Main Railway

From Metz to Lille are the great main line railways which are the necessary lateral communications for this great arc, or bow. They run through Montmédy, Sedan, Hirson, Valenciennes and so to Lille. This line linked up Lorraine with the Belgian sheaf of communications, and all the supplies of the million men who lay in the forward thrust of the great salient between Arras and the Argonne depended on it. Now this railway runs in all its eastern part right under the difficult country of the Ardennes, and if you will look at your map you will see that the point where the belt defending it was narrowest was the sector of Verdun; that is, the two sides of the Upper Meuse just north of that town. It was here that the front ran dangerously close to the main lateral railway, and any considerable advance along the two sides of the Meuse below Verdun threatened to put this vital railway under fire and therefore cut it.

Further, should Allied pressure compel the enemy to retire, he would, of course, retire where there was the most open ground behind him, that is, by the north on the right, pivoting on the left or southeastern extremity of the active front in the sector before Verdun. A strong advance, therefore, in this sector not only threatened to cut off at the root the lateral communications whereby the German armies on the north communicated with the south and thereby the great German mass in the centre was supplied, but also to break the hinge or pivot of a possible retirement, which retirement we know was imposed on the enemy and has taken place.

When on September 26 what the enemy long expected took place and the main battle was opened with a powerful American attack in this vital sector north of Verdun and between the Argonne and the Meuse, the enemy met it by a heavy concentration. It was a matter of life and death for him that the advance of the Allies, whenever it took place, should not be here. He brought up against the American effort everything he could possibly spare, even to the extent of weakening other sectors to the north, and as far as mere ground is concerned he has parried the blow for the moment.

As we all know, the advance in this sector toward Grandpré which has been reached and passed, and toward Dun, which is not yet reached, has been a very painful and laborious effort and expensive in men, and has covered five weeks. Judged by the map alone, or by any one who did not consider the strategical problem as a whole, it looks like a failure.

It is nothing of the kind. On the contrary, it is an operation absolutely fundamental to the Allied plan. To make this appreciated I shall turn in my next points to the function of the containing wing.

The great part of the Americans during the past weeks and pending further operations has been to form the containing wing of the great Allied sweep. The function of such a containing wing in a movement of this sort is the most useful and the most necessary of all, but it is of the kind that least advertises itself in movement.

When you have at once the superiority of numbers and also the initiative over an enemy holding a bulge or salient against you, you try to reduce the salient by striking its two extremities. That is, you act principally on your two wings, maintaining in the centre only as much pressure as is necessary to pin the enemy to his salient, trying as far as possible to hook him.

Now, short of some very bad blunder on the part of the enemy, or gross inferiority, you will hardly secure envelopment in a movement on this vast scale. There is no example in this war, not even against the half-supplied and broken armies of Russia at the end of the 1915 campaign. But by the threat of envelopment you compel him to retire with a very heavy loss of men and material, and during the compulsion he will naturally give way before the wing that threatens his very life. This latter wing, therefore, which by exercising constant and unvarying pressure permits the wing at the other extremity to do its work and go forward, is called the containing wing.

Its rôle is for the moment ungrateful. Its business is to hold great masses of the enemy and by so doing to permit its fellow at the other extreme to advance rapidly and compel a general retirement, but its usefulness to the general scheme is as high and if anything higher than any other component part of the scheme. Not only does it thus contain, that is, pin down and prevent the movement of great masses which the enemy could otherwise use elsewhere, but it exercises the force I have called suction.

This third point of our comprehension of the whole system and the part played by the sectors of the Upper Meuse is very important. A superior opponent has through his superiority this advantage among others over the enemy: He can compel the enemy to fatigue himself. He can compel the enemy to throw in division after division and forbid such divisions after days of battle to obtain sufficient rest. While he himself gives the divisions with which he has recently attacked, say, three weeks for rest and recruitment his dwindling opponents are compelled to throw in corresponding divisions again within a week or ten days, with all the consequent loss of efficiency which is progressively increasing.

On those parts of the line where the enemy short of complete disaster is compelled to hold on at all costs, this compulsion to fatigue his parts is imposed with such severity that he would break down unless he perpetually renewed his forces. As he here suffers the greatest pressure and must hold or lose everything, he pours in men continually, and though the line does not appreciably move on the map, we must visualize wastage, which is more important than movement.

This Vital Sector Is on the Boil

This vital sector, though kept stationary for a time, or nearly stationary, is on the boil. It is the scene of forces perpetually thrown in and exhausted. A look at the following figures will make one appreciate the full meaning.

When the pressure was first seriously applied by the Americans in this vital sector of the upper Meuse the enemy had, I believe, eight divisions to meet the first shock. In the shock the superiority of the forces opposing forced him back, as we know, past Montfaucon. He continued to pour in men. At the beginning of October he had displaced fifteen divisions, by the middle of October twenty and at the close of the month thirty. The process continues.

He had of available divisions ten days ago, that is, divisions for the front, though, of course, not in their full establishment, but now heavily and increasingly depleted, rather over 170, of which less than 160 could be used actively, and of these again a certain number, about forty, were kept in rotation behind the lines, recovering from the effects of battle. Therefore, it is true to say that upon this very short and vital sector of the front the Americans have compelled the enemy to employ something like a fifth of his active strength and this proportion will grow to more nearly a quarter by the time these lines appear.

This, then, has been the function of the American armies at the Meuse during the last five weeks—a function I fear that has not been sufficiently understood and, consequently, has not been receiving its due meed of praise.

Yielding to Continuous Pressure

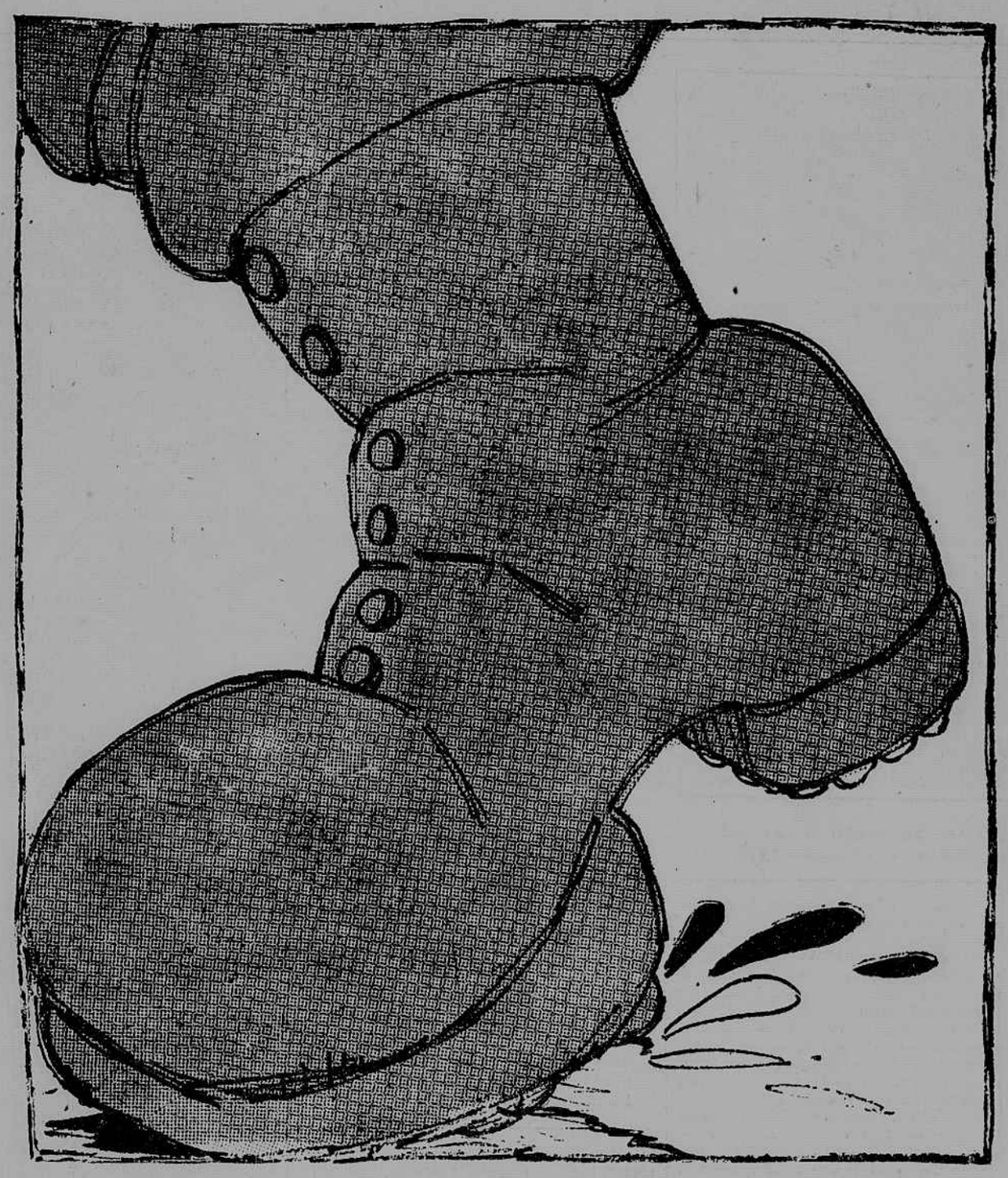
The function of the containing wing has been exercising continuous pressure on the most vital point, compelling the enemy to weaken resistance elsewhere and thereby permitting the whole process of the advance on the north which has lost for the enemy the seacoast and thrown him back from the Scheldt. It has been far more important than any cession of ground, has worn down the line and narrowed the margin between security and the breaking point.

Can the pressure be continued? Will winter conditions and the recruitment of the Allies permit continuance? Undoubtedly. The winter lull of the last two years depended on two factors. One was the exhaustion of the Allied recruitment and the other was the difficulty of advancing over ground in the north; that is, in Flanders, where the great effort took place which had been subjected to the intensive bombardment thought necessary in the earlier stages of the war.

To-day the problem of recruitment is solved by the continual arrival of American forces. The problem of the ground is solved by the fact that the war has become a war of movement, no longer involving the churning up of the soil by prolonged bombardment upon a narrow belt and by the extension of the movement out of the Waterloo district southward to dryer regions.

More important than either of these considerations is the fact to-day the enemy does not hold as equal against equal. He is not, as in late 1916, and even late 1917, an exhausted man standing against another man equally exhausted and both parties pausing to recuperate. He is a man suffering from an exhaustion far more rapid than that of his opponent, and he is a man suffering the political peril of a constantly nearer approach to his own frontiers.

The pressure will continue and it will continue victoriously, and one of the great factors of its victory will prove to have been the containing effort the American armies have exercised this autumn on the upper Meuse.



Beetle Crusher---American Model

—From *Esquella*, Barcelona.

Winter Will Not Save the Hun From Increased Pressure Against His Lines

The Financial Structure of Germany Is Tottering to a Fall

By P. W. Wilson

(Correspondent for "The London Daily News")

THE way of the transgressor is hard, and Germany is said to be bankrupt. Strictly, this is not true, for financial authorities estimate that her assets before the war amounted to $80,000,000,000, and my own belief is that the figure is too small. Anyway, Germany has at present accumulated a debt of about $35,000,000,000, or less than half her whole wealth. On this showing, if she were sold up, she could pay off her liabilities and still have 50 cents on the dollar remaining. We ought not to underestimate even her diminished financial resources, for she is a past master in the art of sustaining credit. Still, her predicament is grave. She publishes no real account of what money she has spent on the war and the above figures do not include the immense liabilities imposed on the individual German states. Moreover, Germany is to-day swept by a panic.

Usually nervous people hoard precious metal. To-day this is impossible in Germany, since the government at an early stage in the war persuaded everybody to part with gold, even to the wedding rings of the married women. Last year small metal coinage was withdrawn as far as possible from circulation, so that what people are to-day putting in their stockings is paper currency. Depositors withdraw their funds from the banks and keep ready money, which bears no interest, in their purses. The result is that after increasing paper money from half a billion dollars before the war to $5,000,000,000 now Germany is still short of available currency, and with a run on the banks proceeding, especially along the Rhine, the printing press has to be kept hard at work, with disastrous results on the financial structure.

Twice every year Germany places a war loan. In September, 1917, her loan raised $3,000,000,000. In March, 1918, with the great drive proceeding, the issue produced nearly $4,000,000,000. This result, like the success of previous loans, was due to the gradual exhaustion of raw material. Everybody was selling everything they possessed to the government and lending back to the government what the government paid. This meant that for the time being there was plenty of money for investment, but it also meant that solid things like stocks of chemicals, wool, food, etc., were being turned into paper. The time has come when paper is the only plentiful thing in the "fatherland," and people are asking how the paper is secured. It is now admitted that the ninth German loan of September last was a failure. This means that Germany is spending $32,000,000 a day on the war without being able to find the money either by taxation or by loan. In other words, she is living on temporary accommodation.

Incidentally, I may compare her condition with that of the United States, which has resources amounting not to $80,000,000,000 but to $225,000,000,000, and has borrowed against those resources not $35,000,000,000, but as yet only about $16,000,000,000.

That comparison is final in determining Germany's ability to win this war. She cannot last out.

She would be in a better position if her financial system were honest, but it is not. Relying on a hope of indemnities to be paid by all countries which the troops occupied, she expected to meet the cost of a short war by means of blackmail and plunder. The prolongation of the war has put upon her, as upon others, burdens which are far in excess of any possible receipts of this kind, and with the certainty that the Allies have it in their power themselves to occupy German territory the question to-day is not how much of indemnity Germany will receive, but how much she will be requested to pay. This is a situation as painful as it is surprising to German financiers, and no preparations have been made to meet it.

Let me explain what this means. In London our leading financial paper is "The Economist," which estimates that the permanent revenue of the German Empire on the present basis of taxation will be $1,750,000,000. If interest is to be paid on the debt expenditure will lie between $3,000,000,000 and $5,000,000,000. In other words, the German budget to-day does not cover one-half the certain outlay by Germany in her first year of peace. In this reckoning I am not including expenses arising out of temporary mobilization. The estimate is for a normal year, when things have settled down.

The above figures assume that the Germany of to-morrow will include all the territory which was hers before the war, but it is now clear that Posen will be detached, and also Alsace-Lorraine, including the iron mines. In addition, it is at least very probable that Prussia will lose a part of Schleswig-Holstein, and the income derived from these provinces will go elsewhere. The Kaiser's little scheme for running a war of rapid aggression without putting any new taxes on his people is therefore likely, indeed certain, to recoil heavily on his victims thus deluded. I do not deny that Britain has been terribly hit in this struggle—more, perhaps, than some Americans realize. With wealth amounting to about $100,000,000,000, which is less than half that of the United States, we have already spent $42,000,000,000. But of this sum $10,000,000,000, or one-quarter, is paid for by taxes. So that only $30,000,000,000 has been borrowed, of which $8,000,000,000 has been lent to Allies and dominions. We do not expect to receive payment for more than about half this item, but even here we are better off than Germany, for Germany will get nothing at all from Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey. This, at least, is the general opinion.

We have seen that the German revenue will be $1,750,000,000. This year the British revenue will be $4,200,000,000. It amply covers the charge on our national debt, even as increased by war. The revenue of the United States is at the rate of $8,000,000,000, which represents about the same proportion to its wealth as our revenue does to wealth in the United Kingdom. In both these democracies, therefore, credit is fully secured, and for a simple reason. Our rich men and corporations are ready to pay taxes. They do it cheerfully and without loss of zeal for the war. But in Germany the wealthy capitalists, in alliance with the wealthy junkers, have done their utmost to force all taxation on the workers. Depending on wealth and aristocracy for his throne, the Kaiser dared not impose the kind of income tax which Republicans and Democrats, Liberals and Conservatives in the English-speaking countries loyally accept. The reason Germany cannot meet her liabilities is that she cannot go for money to the people who have money.

Her position is precisely similar to that of France in the eighteenth century, when a revolution would have been avoided, so far as we can see, if the Bourbons had been able to persuade the privileged classes to forego their immunity from the burdens which fell so heavily on the peasants. Some people say that Germany can cut the Gordian knot by merely cancelling her debt, which means that nobody would pay taxes or receive interest. That is all very well, but the debt was the security on which commerce was to be rehabilitated after the war, and if a man's guaranteed assets disappear in the night how precisely will he meet his liabilities in the morning? Even Turkey, in her periods of spring cleaning, assumed responsibility for a proportion of her debts, only leaving, say, a half to the will of Allah! If Germany repudiates, then it is repudiation, and up to the present repudiation has been regarded as tantamount to national insolvency.

Germany's position is the more serious because her trade, which abounded before the war, was largely speculative and based upon borrowed capital. Her balance sheet was inflated by ambition and was much less sound than the more cautious achievements of nations which regarded trade as human service rather than imperial aggression. That trade has largely gone. Consider for one moment what Germany lost when she despised Great Britain. Before the war Britain was Germany's best customer, buying from her goods to the value of 1,000,000,000 marks a year. Even Austria-Hungary, with a larger population than ours, only purchased the value of 850,000,000 marks. We sold to Germany the value of 800,000,000 marks, and I suppose she paid the balance to us in freights and interest on our loans to her. Commercially we were by far the best friends that Germany ever had, yet to-day Germany has so antagonized our seamen that they will not carry as passenger a representative of the workers like Arthur Henderson because they think that he might be too ready to discuss peace by negotiation. The whole of that immense trade, passing to and fro between Germany and Great Britain, has been shattered and, while England will find other outlets, Germany, bereft of tonnage, is left helpless save in so far as she can prove a sincere repentance and desire to make reparation for the crimes which she has committed.

All this has a bearing on her ability to double or treble her taxes, or rather the revenue derived from them, which is not quite the same thing. In the opinion of many people the vast industries which Germany built up before the war will not quickly recover, and mid-Europe, dependent for 85 per cent of its raw materials on Allied nations, will be driven back on agriculture as a main means of existence. If autocracy continues strict laws may be passed against emigration, but under a revolutionary government such a policy would be impossible, and we may expect to see considerable bodies of German refugees drifting to freer lands than their own. It is very uncertain whether the prisoners of war, especially in Russia, will wish to return home. Also we must remember that the junker class—which in France was destroyed by the guillotine—has fallen largely in battle, where casualties have tended to clear out the caste of birth from which officers were drawn.

The financial future of Germany, therefore, is dark indeed, and she has to face inevitably what she deserves. One result of her plight is likely to be a readiness to limit and indeed to abolish armaments until she has recovered something of her former prosperity. Before the war she maintained able-bodied soldiers. In years to come she will need what money she has to maintain her cripples and her insane.

Finally, I should mention the depreciation of the mark. If peace were signed to-morrow it would be impossible to say at what price the mark would stand on money markets outside of Germany. But the discount would be heavy. That discount would be in effect an addition to the first cost of any raw materials which Germany might obtain for her industries. Yet until her industries are started again she cannot produce the manufactured goods the exports of which would balance the exchange. Apart from a boycott, therefore, she begins life after the war with a serious handicap which will clog the wheels of her factories and compel her to run them at a loss—a less perilous alternative than unemployment of discharged soldiers.

Britain also has had difficulty with her exchanges, especially with America, when we were doing all the buying and you were doing all the selling. But the whole world was eager to help us out by means of credits and other devices. In Germany's case, however, public opinion will not tolerate any such assistance by governments and money markets. She will have to stand on her own feet, and possibly she may begin by selling her raw material at the expense of her industries. Anyway, after the successful wars which occupied her from 1866 to 1871, it took her a decade to get into her commercial stride, and those were the years when the foundations of British commerce, in the modern sense, were laid. This war has not been a success for Germany. It has cost her a hundred times the loss incurred in previous struggles. And she will feel the effects as long as the grandchildren of her youngest babies survive.

"I'm From Iowa; Where Are You From?"

THE American tourist of musical comedy conception is, perforce, off the boards, and will be till the end of the war, at least. It appears, however, that he has not been extinguished—merely diverted—and we have in his place the variety that Charles Belmont Davis, writing in "The Metropolitan Magazine," calls the "stater." Like his predecessor, the "stater" is harmless and well-meaning; nevertheless—well, here's what Mr. Davis says of him:

"From the first day of our arrival in Liverpool I think the real desire of every member of the mission of which I was a member was to see 'our boys' in France. Once there it was certainly not difficult to find them. In Havre we found them on the pier and on the streets and in camps and barracks. . . . I think what I liked best about them was that in a few months they had become so thoroughly an integral part of the great war machine of the Allies. The remark of the coster girl after she had watched line after line of our troops march by on their first parade through London, 'Smile, damn you, smile,' seems quite worthy of the place it now has among the sayings of the great. At a depot supply camp and on other rare occasions I saw a few of our troops smile at the enthusiastic greetings of the members of our mission, but for the most part I found them a serious and grim lot; and I certainly didn't blame them. If I had left my happy Brooklyn or Kansas City home, and was dividing my time between a bare, cheerless room in a French peasant's hut and lying on my stomach in a shellhole dodging German bullets, and a stout American should fly by in a luxurious limousine, wave a small silk American flag at me, and shout, 'I'm from Iowa, where are you from?' I would not only not smile at him, but I'd shoot him.

"Why a man should so love his state above all else I don't know, but I found that many of the members of our mission always had to settle the state question first. Nothing could discourage these 'Staters.' In answer to their cheers of greeting, 'our boys' by the roadside, dusty and tired, would occasionally return the greeting with a nod or a salute, but more often, as far as I could observe, by a hard look; and I loved them for it. However, this coldness had no effect on the 'Staters.' At the very next stop at some small village, while some of the members, usually from the effete East or far West, would wander off to the nearest café for a drink of white wine, the 'Staters' would hurry away to find one of 'our boys' and tell him what state they were from. I remember one occasion in particular where we had gone to the outskirts of Paris to see the city's aircraft defences. On one side of the field a great number of aeroplanes of all kinds had been drawn up in line, and far down the line one section was manned entirely by American aviators. We were very late and far behind our schedule, and the French captain who had us in charge was rushing us along at great speed. By the time we had reached the American escadrille we were out of breath, and the captain positively refused to allow us to stop to greet our men, who stood at salute, each before his own aeroplane. However, the 'Staters' were not to be denied, and as they passed each aviator they shouted only the one word, the name of their own state—'Nebraska!' 'Iowa!' 'Missouri!'"